

[Reprint from THE ALIENIST AND NEUROLOGIST, St. Louis, October, 1887.]

Hypertrichosis, due to General Disease of the Nervous System.*

WITH AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE.



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IT is now a well-established fact that a large number of cases of skin disease is seen whose cause can be traced to some organic or functional disorder of the nervous system. In fact, they seem to be rather the local manifestations of some neurotic disorder than diseases *per se*, and constitute symptoms whose underlying causes are sometimes far removed from the integument itself. This fact is so well known that it would be a work of supererogation to attempt to enumerate the dermal affections of nervous origin.

It is also well known that certain diseases affecting or changes occurring in the hair are frequently due to neurotic influence, such as cases of alopecia areata. That the hair will suddenly blanch, under intense nervous excitement, the authenticated cases on record prove beyond the possibility of all doubt. It is a matter of observation, moreover, that, in certain cases of chronic insanity in women, there is developed a well-marked tendency on the part of the hair of the face and forehead to grow, and to grow profusely, so much so that the patients become bearded. What the reason can be, which underlies this strange perversion of growth, has not yet been satisfactorily determined.

A careful consideration of the above is what led the writer to formulate an opinion, which subsequent results proved to be correct, in the case about to be related. The case is one to which no precedent has been found

* Read before the Mississippi Valley Medical Association, July 15th, 1887.

after a careful search of dermatological literature, of a rather limited extent it is true, although not incomplete to any marked degree.

CASE.—About a year and a half ago, Dr. I. N. Love, of St. Louis, consulted me in regard to the condition of the face of one of his patients, he having accompanied the lady to my office. Upon inquiry, I learned that Mrs. X—, aged twenty-eight, had possessed a remarkably clear complexion and fine skin. She has brown hair, dark brown eyes, and stated that previously her skin was unusually fair and that she was markedly free from any excessive hair growth, Dr. Love corroborating this statement. At the time of examination, the skin was dark, yellowish and somewhat roughened, although to a slight degree only. The sides of the forehead, the sides of the face and the upper lip, principally, were the seat of a perceptible growth of hair, whilst the lanugo hair of the whole face appeared to be somewhat more marked than normal. This growth had developed in a comparatively short time. The hairs were dark brown in color, fine and silky in texture, and varied in length from one-quarter to one-half of an inch. Although the growth could not be called thick, the hairs were situated quite close to each other, and the margin of the hairy portion of the skin was pretty sharply defined against the other. This growth proved to be quite a source of distress to the patient, who had formerly exhibited a certain amount of pardonable pride in the purity of her complexion. She desired to be relieved of her trouble by some local means, having learned of some of the methods employed by dermatologists for the extirpation of hairs.

As is my general custom, I proceeded to interrogate my patient as to the details of her general condition, habits, etc., before giving an opinion. My interrogatories elicited the fact that there existed considerable nervous trouble. It had been pronounced spinal irritation by some, and neurasthenia by others. It appeared to be a malnutrition of the entire nervous system. The food that

should have been appropriated by the nervous tissue seemed to be diverted and converted into adipose tissue. Whilst the patient gained in weight, she lost strength and nerve force, and, in short, her nervous system was being subjected to a slow process of general starvation.

Having satisfactorily settled this point, the opinion I gave was that local treatment of the hypertrichosis would be worse than useless, that all that was necessary was to administer assimilable nerve food, and, in all probability, as the nervous system approached more nearly to a normal standard, the offending hairs would diminish in number and eventually completely disappear at about the same time that her nervous affection did.

Under the management of Dr. Love, the normal functions of the nervous system were gradually restored, and in January, 1887, I was gratified to learn that the patient was restored to a state of complete health. In addition to this the abnormal growth of hair had gradually disappeared. Upon examination, not long since, her complexion was found to be as good as it had ever been, no vestiges of the hypertrichosis remaining, thus confirming the prognosis that had been made. She also looked and felt better, having lost a considerable amount of the adipose which had accumulated so rapidly during her nervous trouble.

Some interesting questions naturally suggest themselves in connection with this case. Whilst it is certainly not sound logic to deduce general conclusions from isolated cases or from a single observed fact, it still seems reasonable to utilize such a fact for this purpose, when the relations of cause and effect appear as plainly defined as they do in the instance given above. One question which suggests itself is: Why was the face the particular seat of this growth of hair in preference to other portions of the body? It is a difficult matter to answer this question, and although it may be suggested that this is probably due to the fact that the face being so much exposed is subject to greater stimulation, and that stimulation or

irritation will, in some cases, produce a perceptible growth of hair where only lanugo existed previously, as has been observed, for instance, at a site where a blistering plaster had been previously applied, we must not forget that in this case the hands, at least, were as much exposed to this stimulation as the face, and still did not exhibit any sign of hypertrichosis.

We are also taught that hypertrichosis follows injuries to nerves, but remains only to disappear as soon as the nerves are restored *ad integrum*. There might exist a local perversion of nutrition, causing an increased growth in quantity without any perceptible decrease in the quality of the hair.

Another interesting question is: Why was there an increased growth in the hair of the face and not a diminished growth in the hair of the head? In other words, would it not appear more probable that a starvation of the nerve tissues should entail alopecia rather than hypertrichosis? Although this might be expected the facts in the case point to the contrary condition. There seems to be but one explanation possible in this case. It is known that the hairs are low in the scale of vitality, and very little pabulum is necessary to supply all their needs. A greater quantity than necessity actually demands will often be taken up and utilized. This is what, in all probability, took place. By some means or other, there was diverted to the face a certain quantity of food refused by the nerve tissues, and this was made use of by the epidermal tissues, thus increasing the growth of hair, the quantity of pigment and the thickness of the epidermis.

The object of this short paper has been to direct attention to a condition which may not be an uncommon one. It is of some little importance, insomuch that in cases where the condition described exists, it will obviate the necessity of resorting to painful local measures, whose value can be nothing but doubtful when the *fons et origo* of the trouble is left untreated. It relegates the treatment of such cases to the domain of the neurologist, and by

being promptly and thoroughly managed, so as to place the nervous system at par once more, may save many disappointments and an unnecessary expenditure of time and patience. It is even preferable to wait until the nervous system is once more normal, with the certainty that the hypertrichosis will persist. For, in such a case, the influence of the nerve disturbance in the production of the hairy growth can be estimated, a less number of hairs may have to be removed, and, without doubt, the patient will be in a much better condition to submit to the necessary manipulations to ensure a radical destruction of the hair papillæ.
